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# IT'S ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK

## A SERMON

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It is not easy to be certain of the precise origin and meaning of the saying in which my theme is stated. The dictionaries take it as essentially synonymous with "It comes in the course of business." And I am using the phrase, myself, in what I suppose is practically its dictionary meaning, as giving a point of view from which one may well think of the work of his life—a point of view that aims not to make too much of any single incident in the day's work; that takes what comes, facing it thoughtfully and energetically, and turning with undiminished energy to the next thing. It is the point of view of the modest man who deprecates the fact that anyone should make over much of the difficulties or suffering that he has had to face, or of heroism that he has shown, or of achievements he has accomplished. He has learned, as Kipling puts it, how many are "the things no fellow can do," and, therefore, from hour to hour and from day to day, would do as matter of course just what befits a man, and under either praise or commiseration is inclined quite honestly to say, "Oh, it's all in the day's work."

This point of view may seem to have a touch of modern grayness in it, as over against the high colors of antiquity or of the chivalry of the Middle Ages. To men of certain temperaments it may even seem to be the mood of the disillusioned,

who know well that they must not anticipate striking achievements for themselves or for others. But one may not forget, at the same time, that no age has had so keen a vision as ours of the large possibilities in common men and common ways.

The real question, then, that I wish to bring is this: How are we to think of our lives as we look forward to them? What mood are we to carry into them? In what spirit are we to take life and to face its vicissitudes? For a man's point of view and his mood toward life have, after all, everything to do with what his life is to mean to himself and to other men. And my thought is that this everyday phrase, "It's all in the day's work," may well indicate both mood and point of view.

Five suggestions it may be said to contain: The true view of life is not the ascetic view; nor the attitude of self-pity; nor the point of view of mediaeval chivalry, with its faith in the aristocracy of certain events; nor a like faith in the aristocracy of persons, even in attempted service; but the straightforward taking on, with cheer and courage, of whatever is involved in the goal one has set himself. These five suggestions seem to me to be expressed in classic form in five passages of Scripture, which taken together may be said to reflect the true view of one's life and work: "I have

learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content"; "Take thy part in suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"; "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly"; "Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith"; "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal."

1. First of all, then, I suppose it may be confidently said that the Christian view of life is *not the ascetic view*.

The Christian man is not to seek pain for pain's sake, as though it had some good in itself; and he is not to regard the body as evil *per se*, but as having rather its own proper place and function and good. He is not to belong to those ardent but mistaken souls that seek martyrdom, even in a good cause. And he will still less lay stress on the sufferings that he has had to face in the path of duty. And he is not even willing to take a merely Stoic attitude, that simply stands life's hard experiences and hardships under them. He exhorts his soul, rather, in the language of the old hymn, to "put a cheerful courage on." He does not deny pain nor suffering, nor their possible ministry of good. He does not deny the temptations of the body. He knows well that experiences may come to a man that it will take all his fortitude to bear. He has no doubt that there may even come an hour when a man simply cannot be a true man and at the same time turn away from martyrdom for the cause in which he is enlisted. Nevertheless, the point of view of the Christian man is not to be either that of the ascetic, who believes that deliverance comes by

abuse of the body or by seeking suffering, or that of the mere Stoic who would harden himself against all that life can bring. The Christian man essays a more difficult task than either ascetic or Stoic; he means to retain his sensitiveness of soul, his capacity for joy and suffering, and yet to keep his courage.

No one has stated better than Paul this paradoxical attitude of the Christian man: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want." Here is no lack of sensitiveness, and here is no perverse choice of abasement and hunger, but the cheerful courage of a true child of God, who believes that God has intrusted to him great and significant work, in the wake of which no doubt will be found many contrasted experiences, but who believes that these, nevertheless, cannot affect the significance of the work.

2. But if the point of view of the true man is not, on the one hand, ascetic or Stoic, *still less is it, on the other hand, the attitude of whimpering self-pity*.

The Christian man may not allow himself to become a soured or sulky or spoiled or embittered soul. He must learn to detest the spirit of constant complaint and the feebleness of will and character that is unwilling to stand anything of hardship. More than work, more than hardship, more than the severest discipline, he fears a dwindling self. It is this—the fear of a dwindling self—not the ascetic spirit, that makes him fear "the easy job," "the soft place." For to be contented with any lot in life that does not task one's powers and demand

growth is to insure life's worst calamity, the dwindling self. An idle, selfish, self-indulgent leisure class is a menace not only to itself but to the whole community of which it is a part. Just because the Christian point of view is not the ascetic point of view, one must say with Jeremy Taylor: "He that hath so many causes of joy, and so great, is very much in love with sorrow and peevishness, who loses all these pleasures, and chooses to sit down upon his little handful of thorns." In the background of our minds, at the very time that we are praying that our lot may be made easy, there may be the discomfiting feeling that if our prayer were granted we should have to take the answer along with diminished self-respect. The words of Phillips Brooks upon this point have become familiar, because they answer so truthfully to the perception of many an honest man: "O do not pray for easy lives! Pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks! Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle. But you shall be a miracle."

Placed, therefore, in the midst of an imperfect, developing world, and among imperfect, developing men, and with a nature that demands work that will task its powers, the true man knows that there cannot fail to be plenty of what men call hardship from which he may not and would not excuse himself, and he takes to his own soul, therefore, the old but significant exhortation (as it reads in the margin): "Take thy part in suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." He knows that he ought to have his share in the strenuous and difficult and disagreeable work of the world that must be done, and he

does not mean cowardly to shirk his part.

And however hard our lot may seem—it is well to remember—we certainly cannot improve it by whining, nor get more out of life by permitting ourselves the embittered spirit. That is final defeat. It is no denial of the facts that is asked for; it is no childish pretending that bitter things are sweet; it is no assertion that all lives are equal in hardship, though the differences are probably less than, judging from the surface of things, we are likely to think. It is even true that there may come to one what he naturally regards as a succession of peculiarly bitter and unjust experiences. Nevertheless, it is out of circumstances like these that some of the choicest spirits and some of the world's best work have come. And in any case, there is just one mood in which an experience, however hard, may be safely faced: "Take thy part in suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

3. But though a man is to fight a good fight, and to take his part in suffering hardship as a good soldier, his attitude toward life, nevertheless, is *not to be that of mediaeval romance and chivalry*, as though the meaning and value of life attached only to certain decorative and conventionally romantic scenes and events and careers, that are far away from the prose of common life.

It is a part of the progress of democracy that it tends to deny not only the aristocracy of persons, but also the aristocracy of events and careers, and glories in the significance of the commonplace. Democracy is not willing any longer to believe that it is only knights and pirates and warriors whose careers offer the elements of romance. It is

quite certain that heroics and trumpets and the fife and the drum and all the fuss and feathers of military glamor are not requisite to the significant event. It may feel the fatal fascination of these things, and protest against it with Richard le Gallienne:

War  
I abhor;  
And yet how sweet  
The sound along the marching street  
Of drum and fife, and I forget  
Broken old mothers, and the whole  
Dark butchering without a soul.

Without a soul—save this bright treat  
Of heady music, sweet as hell;  
And even my peace-abiding feet  
Go marching with the marching street,  
For yonder goes the fife,  
And what care I for human Life;  
The tears fill my astonished eyes,  
And my full heart is like to break,  
And yet it is embannered lies,  
A dream those drummers make.

Oh, it is wickedness to clothe  
Yon hideous, grinning thing that stalks  
Hidden in music, like a queen  
That in a garden of glory walks,  
Till good men love the things they  
loathe;  
Art, thou hast many infamies,  
But not an infamy like this.

Still, democracy is certain that it is not the trappings of the scene or event that bring meaning and value into it, but the content—the spirit and the aim there shown. This was the lesson that Sir Launfal learned when he returned, hopeless and defeated, from his years of search for the Holy Grail, to find at the very gates of the castle whence he had gone out the Christ in the guise of the beggar to whom he had cast a careless coin as he set out on his romantic quest.

And Eggleston's circuit-riding minister was sure that, even if the end of the world were at hand, it could find him no better employed than riding quietly on to meet his next appointment. There is no aristocracy of events.

It is a wholesome tendency, thus, that leads so many modern writers of fiction to uncover for us ideals, none the less real because they appear in so strange disguise, and that sees in the most unpromising surroundings and in the commonest tasks and scenes opportunities for what men have called the romantic. It is the superficial and unimaginative soul that can see the ideal only when it is duly labeled and conventionally garbed.

But just as the denial of the aristocracy of persons does not mean that all persons are of equal importance, but rather that every one is of priceless significance, so the denial of the aristocracy of events and places and careers does not mean that all are to be put on a dead level, but rather that in any one a man's spirit may be shown, and that therefore every day, as Emerson says, is a doomsday.

Nor can we pick out the important event or place or career by any external test. We do not know which, in the outcome, are to prove most significant. We cannot forecast the unconscious moment when we shall be weighed in the balances; we cannot anticipate the moment of crisis. The history both of the individual and of the world declines to be divided into dramatic epochs by the ringing down of the curtain or the shifting of the scenes. The great events, as they later prove themselves, still refuse to sound a trumpet before them. As scientific investigation cannot safely decide before-

hand what facts or truths are to prove most important, but must search impartially for the whole truth, and as democracy cannot safely overlook the value of any human soul, so the man who means manfully to face his work may not lightly estimate any least bit of it, but is to be sure that in every portion he may prove himself a man, and that that portion, however commonplace it seems, is thereby glorified. Any hour in which a man has been utterly true is an hour of glory, however gray and dull its garb.

Places and careers may differ greatly in their conspicuousness and their outward glamor, but these are no measure of the service that may be rendered in them. And the same kind of fidelity unto the uttermost that the world has always asked from soldiers, it has long asked from captains of vessels, and is asking from locomotive engineers. It is coming to see that it must apply no less a standard to every other calling. And the physician and the scientific investigator are already measuring up to this standard. For science and medicine have their martyrs as well as religion; nor these alone.

'Twas said: "When roll of drum and battle's  
roar

Shall cease upon the earth, O, then no more  
The deed,—the race,—of heroes in the land."  
But scarce that word was breathed when one  
small hand

Lifted victorious o'er a giant wrong  
That had its victims crushed through ages  
long;

Some woman set her pale and quivering face  
Firm as a rock against a man's disgrace;

A little child suffered in silence lest  
His savage pain should wound a mother's  
breast;

Some quiet scholar flung his gauntlet down  
And risked in Truth's great name, the  
synod's frown;

A civic hero, in the calm realm of laws,  
Did that which suddenly drew a world's  
applause;

And one to the pest his lithe young body  
gave  
That he a thousand thousand lives might  
save.

Thus to deny the favored aristocracy of any place or event or career, thus to affirm the possible glory of every hour and every place and every event, is to remember that "it's all in the day's work." "Even so run; that ye may attain." Has anyone ever put more pointedly than Paul this determination to make every stroke count? "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air."

4. But when a man has determined to make his life one of service to his fellow-men, and to give himself with all earnestness to that service, there is involved in this very determination a subtle temptation—the temptation of the favored man, with earnest and benevolent aims, who finds it easy to assume superiority, and drifts into an unconscious pharisaism of intellectual and spiritual pride.

Once more, then, when one says, "It's all in the day's work," he is to make sure that that does not mean the assumption of the aristocratic point of view in the service rendered. Readers of Tolstoy will remember how vehement is his protest at this point; how almost scornfully he would sweep away the attempted benevolence of the favored classes in their endeavors to help an uneducated peasant class; how certain he is that it is highly probable that those who feel so

competent to help are themselves less and have therefore less to give than those they desire to aid; and how certain he is, too, that they give themselves in less degree to others than these others give, whom they would help. This false idea of service seems to Tolstoy to lie

at the base of all the crimes which are being daily committed. I refer [he says, in a letter to a friend] to the opinion that men, provided or not provided with diplomas, as narrow-minded as they are uncultivated, but possessing great assurance, conclude, one knows not why, that since they are so intelligent and worthy, they need not try to govern themselves, but that their vocation and sacred duty is to enlighten, organize, and direct the lives of others. . . . The condition *sine qua non* of all good and all useful activity is humility. As soon as humility is lacking good becomes evil. The highest virtue is love; but love without humility, haughty love, is the negation of love. . . . Today the disease seems to affect everybody. Boys and girls in the high school do not think a moment about the evil that is in them and how to make themselves worthy citizens. Their sole care is to know how best to educate the people.

One suspects in Tolstoy's vehemence a disproportionate emphasis—forgetting the indispensable need of fellowship among all—and yet he warns, I cannot doubt, of a real and serious danger. Let a man, therefore, first of all, be utterly true to the trust of his own moral life; let him make certain that his own inner spirit is of such a quality that its even unconscious contagion cannot help being lifegiving, and to that end let him be stern in his own self-discipline. Let him, in the second place, be ready to see the best in the other man, and eager to learn from him—willing to receive as well as to

give, to learn as well as to teach; and this some temperaments find the more difficult task of the two, essential though it be. And then let him render in deep humility such service as God gives him power to do, "not thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think, but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith." One is not to be an aristocrat in his work.

5. But that a man should say, "It's all in the day's work," has a still further vital bearing on his outlook on life. So saying, one should mean that he *takes all that comes, pleasant or painful, bitter or sweet, as simply involved in the goal he has set himself*, in the work assigned, in the trust assumed, in the ideal cherished, in the kind of man he purposes to be. He has chosen his goal, and whatever is necessary to that goal he takes as simple matter of course. He finds Paul once again expressing with exactness his own viewpoint: "I count not myself to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal." One's sufferings and sacrifices appear in a different light when one looks at them as simply involved in the goal that he himself has chosen. Though the point of view is neither that of the mediaeval knight nor that of the modern aristocrat, it is still not a dull and hopeless drudgery to which a man is doomed. The goal illumines all the course toward it.

For after all, life is much like a *game*, and it is "the checkered game of life" that we all have to play. Life is more than life's prizes. The team that has played squarely and cleanly, and with

every faculty alert, the best game that it was in them to play may go off the field with thorough self-respect, though defeated. And the team that has played a dirty game or in any way won unworthily will have to go off the field with self-contempt, though victorious. General Lee was the defeated commander-in-chief of a defeated cause, but to have lived such a life as he lived, and to have won the honor of foe as well as friend, was no defeat. It is no small part, indeed, of life to have learned to be in the true sense a good sportsman; to have learned to be a good and not a poor loser; to have learned to be a generous winner. Shall a man ask less from himself on the field of life than on the baseball diamond or the football field? Is he to find it impossible to say in life what he found grace to say in the game? "You deserved your victory and made a splendid fight"; or, on the other hand: "Hard luck, old fellow, better luck next time." It means very much for a man's life and work that he should be neither soured nor glum nor mean nor petty; that he should get thoroughly out of him every trace of jealousy and envy, and that he should get grace to do what is even more difficult than to "weep with them that weep"—namely, to "rejoice with them that rejoice." And, fortunately, in life's truest successes there is no rivalry of claim. One's victory in the highest not only means no other man's defeat, but means, rather, his more certain victory. For achievement in character and in loving service is open to every soul.

And just as it is helpful sometimes to look at life from the point of view of the game, so also help may come when we view it as an *adventure*, and see that

every man who sets out on an adventure accepts willingly all the risks involved; they are anticipated and taken as a matter of course, as, once again, involved in the goal that he has set himself. The hunter or discoverer or explorer, the pioneer, the scientific investigator, know well from the beginning the risks they may have to run. They know that there is likely to be much of hardship on the way, and they have faced it beforehand. None of these adventures have been forced upon them; they have voluntarily taken up some great challenge that nature has flung at their feet, and they do not blink the perils involved. Think of Scott and his company at the South Pole. They recognize even that life itself may be the price required, but they press none the less toward the goal, bearing with fortitude what comes, grimly fighting what must be fought, calling on their sense of humor by the way, and paying, if they must, the price of life. It is in a spirit much like this that the Christian presses toward his goal in the adventure of life or in the great adventure of death. And in the vision of the goal he does not make overmuch of the intervening experiences. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before," he presses on toward the goal.

And if the game and the adventure have help to give for one's mood in life, the point of view of the artist or of the expert worker has no less help. Both set before them the goal of *high achievement*, of an ideal embodiment of the ideal they cherish. And they know the cost involved. They understand the months of steady toil and the monotonous drudgery that must intervene before the



satisfying work of art or the scientific achievement they seek can become a fact, and they grudge not one step of the way. The goal is worth its cost, and they do not grumble at the cost. Shall the Christian man or woman (or church or nation) who seeks still more perfectly such ideal embodiment of the ideal chafe and complain at the cost of his still greater achievement? He, too, is to remember his goal and to take all else as incidental to that goal. When he chose his goal he chose with full purpose of heart all that was necessary to it.

Moreover, it is always impossible to separate a man's work from the man himself. And the cost of achievement in work involves, therefore, at every step *a like cost in the discipline of the man*. That we ourselves may become the larger men and women we ought to become, there must be the steady calling out of "our too reluctant wills." The discipline of the struggle the true man would not spare. For he knows how flabby often is both his intellectual and his moral fiber, and he does not mean to shirk the discipline that will make firm and strong the inmost fiber of his life. Let no man forget his peril at this point. It is a wholesome good sense, after all, that exhorts a man to stop his complaining and to "take his medicine."

In the vision of the great goals of life, therefore, happiness inevitably takes on a different aspect, and it is not strange that one of the recent Gifford lecturers closed his series of lectures by quoting the often-cited passage from the Epilogue to George Eliot's *Romola*:

We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts and much feeling

for the rest of the world as well as for ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we should choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good.

The true man, that is, cannot give up his goal. He cannot surrender the ideal cherished. He would not fail in the task assumed, or deny the largeness of his nature, and he pays with gladness, therefore, the price of attainment. He would look clear through to the end and actualize the paradox of Christ: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone, but if it die, it beareth much fruit."

It is a part of the truth we have been considering, to remember the immense significance of any day in which a man girds himself for his task. I have been asking you thus to adjust spirit and mood to the coming experiences of life:

First of all, in the calmness of high and unswerving purpose, and yet in no hard ascetic or Stoic mood, may you be given power to say, with cheerful courage as the years go on, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound; in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want."

Set free, too, in the second place, from self-pity and the spirit of complaint, put steel into your soul with the old words, "Take thy part in suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Certain, also, that any hour, any place, any career may hold, though deeply disguised, its own glory, say again, "I therefore so run, as not uncer-

tainly; so fight I, as not beating the air." There is no aristocracy of events.

With earnest desire, moreover, to serve in work worth doing, and with self-respect as one member of the body of Christ, yet with heartfelt humility in view both of the much that you must receive from the other members of the body and of the divine ideal for yourselves, may God give you grace to do your work, not thinking of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith. Let no mental or moral conceit mar your life and defeat even your purposes of good. There can be no aristocracy in service.

And once more, keep the vision of your goal, and take with equanimity whatever that goal involves. Have the spirit of a good sportsman; don't chafe under the rules of the game. Be a good loser and a generous winner. You are in the midst of the adventure of life. Do not resent the risks of that adventure. Be willing to pay the price of high attainment and of an endless self-discipline. For you cannot choose with satisfaction a selfish happiness. Forget the things that are behind and press toward the goal.

There is almost an epitome of what I have been trying to say in an incident

which one of Norman Duncan's characters tells of his childhood and of his mother:

She took me in her lap.

"Look into your mother's eyes, lad," she said, "and say after me this: 'My mother'"—

"My mother," I repeated, very solemnly.

"Looked upon my heart"—

"Looked upon my heart," said I.

"And found it brave"—

"An' found it brave,"

"And sweet"—

"An' sweet."

"Willing for the day's work"—

"Willing for the day's work," I repeated.

"And harboring no shameful hope"—

"An' harboring—no shameful—hope."

Again and again she had me say it, until I knew every word by heart.

"Ah," she said at last, "but you'll forget."

"No, no!" I cried. "I'll not forget. 'My mother looked upon my heart,' I rattled, 'an' found it brave and sweet, willing for the day's work an' harboring no shameful hope.' I've not forgot! I've not forgot."

"He'll forget," she whispered, but not to me, "like all children."

But I have not forgotten—I have not forgotten—I have never forgotten—that, when I was a child, my mother looked upon my heart and found it brave and sweet, willing for the day's work and harboring no shameful hope.